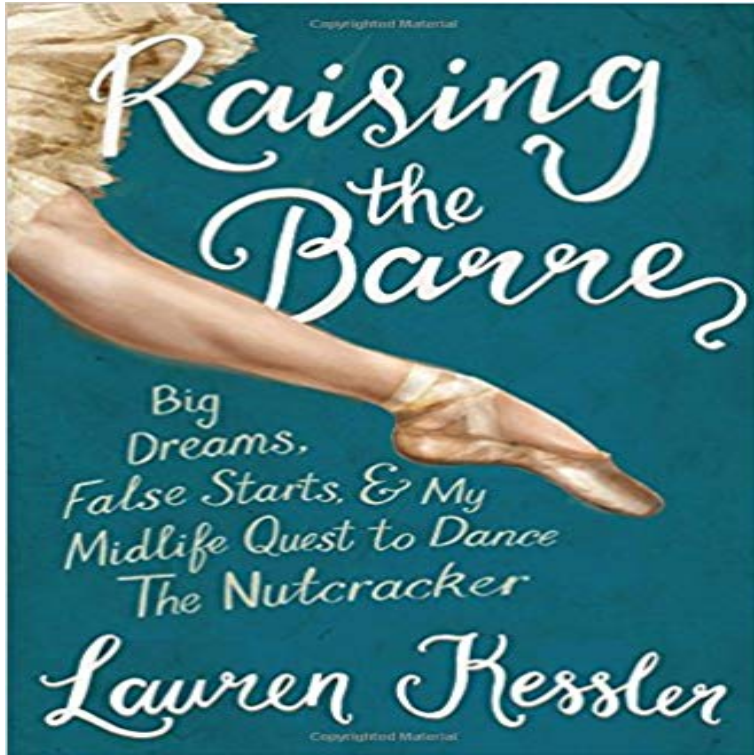


## Raising the Barre: Big Dreams, False Starts, and My Midlife Quest to Dance the Nutcracker



Like generations of little girls, Lauren Kessler fell in love with ballet the first time she saw *The Nutcracker*, and from that day, at age five, she dreamed of becoming a ballerina. But when she was twelve, her very famous ballet instructor crushed those dreams along with her youthful self-assurance and she stepped away from the barre. Fast forward four decades. Lauren suddenly, powerfully, itchingly restless at midlife embarks on a Transcontinental Nutcracker Binge Tour, where attending a string of performances in Chicago, New York, Boston, and San Francisco reignites her love affair with the ballet and fuels her girlhood dream. What ensues is not only a story about *The Nutcracker* itself, but also an inside look at the seemingly romantic but oh-so-gritty world of ballet, about all that happens away from the audience's eye that precedes the magic on stage. It is a tale told from the perspective of someone who not only loves it, but is also seeking to live it. Lauren's quest to dance *The Nutcracker* with the Eugene Ballet Company tackles the big issues: fear, angst, risk, resilience, the refusal to settle in to midlife, the refusal to become yet another Invisible Woman. It is also a very funny, very real look at what it's like to push yourself further than you ever thought you could go and what happens when you get there.

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